

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An absorbent garment for wear about a wearer's waist, said absorbent garment comprising:

a garment shell configured for encircling the wearer's waist and having a front waist region, a front waist end at said front waist region, a back waist region, and a back waist end at said back waist region, the garment shell comprising a front panel assembly having laterally opposite side margins, and a back panel assembly having laterally opposite side margins; and

an absorbent assembly disposed within the garment shell and constructed to take in and retain body exudates released by the wearer, the absorbent assembly having an inner surface adapted for contiguous relationship with the wearer's body, an outer surface, a front waist region in opposed relationship with the front waist region of the garment shell, a back waist region in opposed relationship with the back waist region of the garment shell, a crotch region extending longitudinally between and interconnecting the front waist region and the back waist region, a front waist end and a back waist end, the absorbent assembly being attached at the front waist region thereof to the garment shell generally at the side margins of the front panel assembly to together define front side margins of the absorbent garment, said absorbent assembly further being attached at the back waist region thereof to the garment shell generally at the side margins of the back panel assembly to together define back side margins of the absorbent garment, the front side margins and the back side margins of the absorbent garment being releasably attached to each other to removably secure the absorbent garment on the wearer's waist.

2. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein at least a portion of the front waist end of the absorbent assembly is attached to the front waist end of the garment shell and at least a portion of the back waist end of the
5 absorbent assembly is attached to the back waist end of the garment shell.

3. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent assembly has laterally opposite outer edges at the front waist region of said absorbent assembly and corresponding laterally opposite outer edges generally at the
5 back waist region of said absorbent assembly, the absorbent assembly being attached generally at the laterally opposite outer edges of the front waist region to the garment shell generally at the side margins of the front panel assembly and being further attached generally at the laterally opposite
10 outer edges of the back waist region to the garment shell generally at the side margins of the back panel assembly.

4. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 3 wherein the absorbent garment has laterally opposite front side panels extending laterally outward generally at the front waist region of the absorbent assembly and having respective
5 outer edges defining the outer edges of the absorbent assembly at said front waist region, and laterally opposite back side panels extending laterally outward generally at the back waist region of the absorbent assembly and having
10 respective outer edges defining the outer edges at said back waist region of the absorbent assembly, the front side panels being attached generally at the outer edges thereof to the front panel assembly of the garment shell generally at the side margins of said front panel assembly, the back side panels being attached generally at the outer edges thereof to

15 the back panel assembly of the garment shell generally at the side margins of said back panel assembly.

5 5. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent garment has at least one outer leg opening and a pair of inner leg openings separate from the at least one leg opening and disposed within the garment shell, the absorbent assembly at least in part defining said inner leg openings of the absorbent garment, said garment shell defining said at least one outer leg opening of the absorbent garment.

5 6. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 5 wherein the absorbent assembly is configured to provide an elastic fit of the absorbent assembly against the wearer's legs at the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment, the garment shell being configured to generally hang loose about the wearer's legs at the at least one outer leg opening of the absorbent garment.

7. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 5 wherein the absorbent assembly is configured to encircle the legs of the wearer and fully defines the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment.

5 8. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 5 wherein the garment shell further has a crotch region extending longitudinally between the front and back waist regions of the garment shell, the crotch region of the garment shell at least in part defining a pair of outer leg openings of the absorbent garment which are separate from the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment.

9. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 8 wherein the crotch region of the absorbent assembly is free from attachment to the crotch region of the garment shell.

10. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 further comprising at least one waist elastic member operatively joined to at least one of the front waist end of the absorbent assembly, the back waist end of the absorbent
5 assembly, the front waist end of the garment shell and the back waist end of the garment shell to provide an elastic fit of the absorbent garment against the wearer's waist.

11. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent assembly is elastically stretchable at least at said front and back waist ends of said absorbent assembly, the front and back waist ends of the absorbent
5 assembly being operatively joined respectively to the front and back waist ends of the garment shell to gather the garment shell generally at the front and back waist ends of said garment shell.

12. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent garment has a waist opening, the absorbent assembly being configured to encircle the waist of the wearer generally at the front and back waist ends of the
5 absorbent assembly to fully define the waist opening of the absorbent garment.

13. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 12 wherein the absorbent assembly is a brief-style absorbent assembly.

14. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the garment shell has a configuration selected from the group comprising shorts, skorts, skirts and swim trunks.

15. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1 wherein the absorbent garment has a waist opening, at least one outer leg opening, and laterally opposite side seams

extending generally from the waist opening to said at least
5 one outer leg opening, the absorbent garment being
refastenable along at least a portion of each of said side
seams.

16. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 15
wherein the absorbent garment is refastenable along the
entire length of each of said side seams.

17. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1
wherein the absorbent garment has laterally opposite front
side margins and corresponding laterally opposite back side
margins, the front side margins and the back side margins
5 being in overlapping relationship with each other to define
laterally opposite side seams of the absorbent garment, the
amount of overlap of the front side margins with the back
side margins being in the range of about 0.1 inches (2.5 mm)
to about 6 inches (152.4 mm).

18. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 17
wherein the amount of overlap of the front side margins with
the back side margins is in the range of about 0.5 inches
(12.7 mm) to about 3 inches (76.2 mm).

19. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 1
wherein the absorbent assembly comprises a liquid permeable
liner defining the inner surface of the absorbent assembly
adapted for contiguous relationship with the wearer, an outer
5 cover in generally opposed relationship with the liner and
defining the outer surface of the absorbent assembly, and an
absorbent body disposed between the liner and the outer
cover.

20. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 19
wherein the outer cover of the absorbent assembly is liquid
impermeable and the garment shell is liquid permeable.

21. An absorbent garment for wear about a wearer's waist, said absorbent garment comprising:

5 a garment shell configured for encircling the wearer's waist and being further configured as a pair of shorts having a pair of leg openings defining outer leg openings of the absorbent garment; and

10 an absorbent assembly disposed within the garment shell and constructed to take in and retain body exudates released by the wearer, at least a portion of the absorbent assembly being attached to the garment shell, said absorbent assembly having an inner surface adapted for contiguous relationship with the wearer's body, an outer surface, a front waist region, a back waist region, and a crotch region extending longitudinally between and interconnecting the front waist region and the back waist region of the absorbent assembly, 15 said absorbent assembly at least in part defining inner leg openings of the absorbent garment wherein said inner leg openings are separate from the outer leg openings of the absorbent garment;

20 the absorbent garment further having a waist opening, laterally opposite front side margins and corresponding laterally opposite back side margins, the front side margins and back side margins being at least in part defined by the garment shell, said front side margins of the absorbent 25 garment being in overlapping relationship with said back side margins of the absorbent garment to define laterally opposite side seams of the absorbent garment wherein the side seams each have a length extending generally from the waist opening of the absorbent garment to a respective one of the outer leg openings of the absorbent garment, said side seams of the 30 absorbent garment each having a respective upper segment along which the front side margins and back side margins of the absorbent garment are attached to each other, said upper

segment having a length extending from the waist opening of
35 the absorbent garment to less than about 50 percent of the
length of the side seam, the front side margins and the back
side margins of the absorbent garment being free from
attachment to each other along the remaining length of each
respective side seam generally from the upper segment of said
40 side seam to the respective outer leg opening of the
absorbent garment.

22. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 21
wherein the amount of overlap of the front side margins of
the absorbent garment with the back side margins of the
absorbent garment is in the range of about 0.1 inches (2.5
5 mm) to about 6 inches (152.4 mm).

23. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 22
wherein the amount of overlap of the front side margins of
the absorbent garment with the back side margins of the
absorbent garment is in the range of about 0.5 inches (12.7
5 mm) to about 3 inches (76.2 mm)

24. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 21
wherein the front side margins of the absorbent garment and
the back side margins of the absorbent garment are releasably
attached to each other at the upper segments of the side
5 seams of the absorbent garment.

25. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 21
wherein the garment shell comprises a front panel assembly
having laterally opposite side margins and a back panel
assembly having laterally opposite side margins, the
5 absorbent assembly being attached at the front waist region
thereof to the garment shell generally at the side margins of
the front panel assembly to together define the front side
margins of the absorbent garment, said absorbent assembly

further being attached at the back waist region thereof to
10 the garment shell generally at the side margins of the back
panel assembly to together define the back side margins of
the absorbent garment.

26. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 21
wherein the absorbent assembly further has a front waist end
and a back waist end, the garment shell also having a front
waist end and a back waist end, at least a portion of the
5 front waist end of the absorbent assembly being attached to
the front waist end of the garment shell and at least a
portion of the back waist end of the absorbent assembly being
attached to the back waist end of the garment shell.

27. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 25
wherein the absorbent assembly has laterally opposite outer
edges at the front waist region of said absorbent assembly
and corresponding laterally opposite outer edges generally at
5 the back waist region of said absorbent assembly, the
absorbent assembly being attached generally at its laterally
opposite outer edges of the front waist region to the garment
shell generally at the side margins of the front panel
assembly, the absorbent assembly being further attached
10 generally its laterally opposite outer edges of the back
waist region to the garment shell generally at the side
margins of the back panel assembly.

28. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 27
wherein the absorbent garment has laterally opposite front
side panels extending laterally outward generally at the
front waist region of the absorbent assembly and having
5 respective outer edges defining the outer edges of the
absorbent assembly at said front waist region, and laterally
opposite back side panels extending laterally outward
generally at the back waist region of the absorbent assembly

and having respective outer edges defining the outer edges at
10 said back waist region of the absorbent assembly, the front
side panels being attached generally at the outer edges
thereof to the front panel assembly of the garment shell
generally at the side margins of said front panel assembly,
the back side panels being attached generally at the outer
15 edges thereof to the back panel assembly of the garment shell
generally at the side margins of said back panel assembly.

29. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 21
wherein the absorbent assembly is configured to provide an
elastic fit of the absorbent assembly against the wearer's
legs at the inner leg openings of the absorbent garment, the
5 garment shell being configured to generally hang loose about
the wearer's legs at the outer leg openings of the absorbent
garment.

30. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 21
wherein the absorbent assembly is configured to encircle the
legs of the wearer and fully defines the inner leg openings
of the absorbent garment.

31. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 21
wherein the absorbent assembly further has a front waist end
and a back waist end, the garment shell also having a front
waist end and a back waist end, the absorbent garment further
5 comprising at least one waist elastic member operatively
joined to at least one of the front waist end of the
absorbent assembly, the back waist end of the absorbent
assembly, the front waist end of the garment shell and the
back waist end of the garment shell to provide an elastic fit
10 of the absorbent garment against the wearer's waist.

32. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 21
wherein the absorbent assembly further has a front waist end

and a back waist end, the garment shell also having a front waist end and a back waist end, the absorbent assembly being
5 elastically stretchable at least at the front and back waist ends of said absorbent assembly, the front and back waist ends of the absorbent assembly being operatively joined respectively to the front and back waist ends of the garment shell to gather the garment shell generally at the front and
10 back waist ends of said garment shell.

33. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 21 wherein the absorbent garment has a waist opening, the absorbent assembly having front and back waist ends and being configured to encircle the waist of the wearer generally at
5 the front and back waist ends of the absorbent assembly to fully define the waist opening of the absorbent garment.

34. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 33 wherein the absorbent assembly is a brief-style absorbent assembly.

35. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 21 wherein the absorbent assembly comprises a liquid permeable liner defining the inner surface of the absorbent assembly adapted for contiguous relationship with the wearer, an outer
5 cover in generally opposed relationship with the liner and defining the outer surface of the absorbent assembly, and an absorbent body disposed between the liner and the outer cover.

36. An absorbent garment as set forth in claim 35 wherein the outer cover of the absorbent assembly is liquid impermeable and the garment shell is liquid permeable.